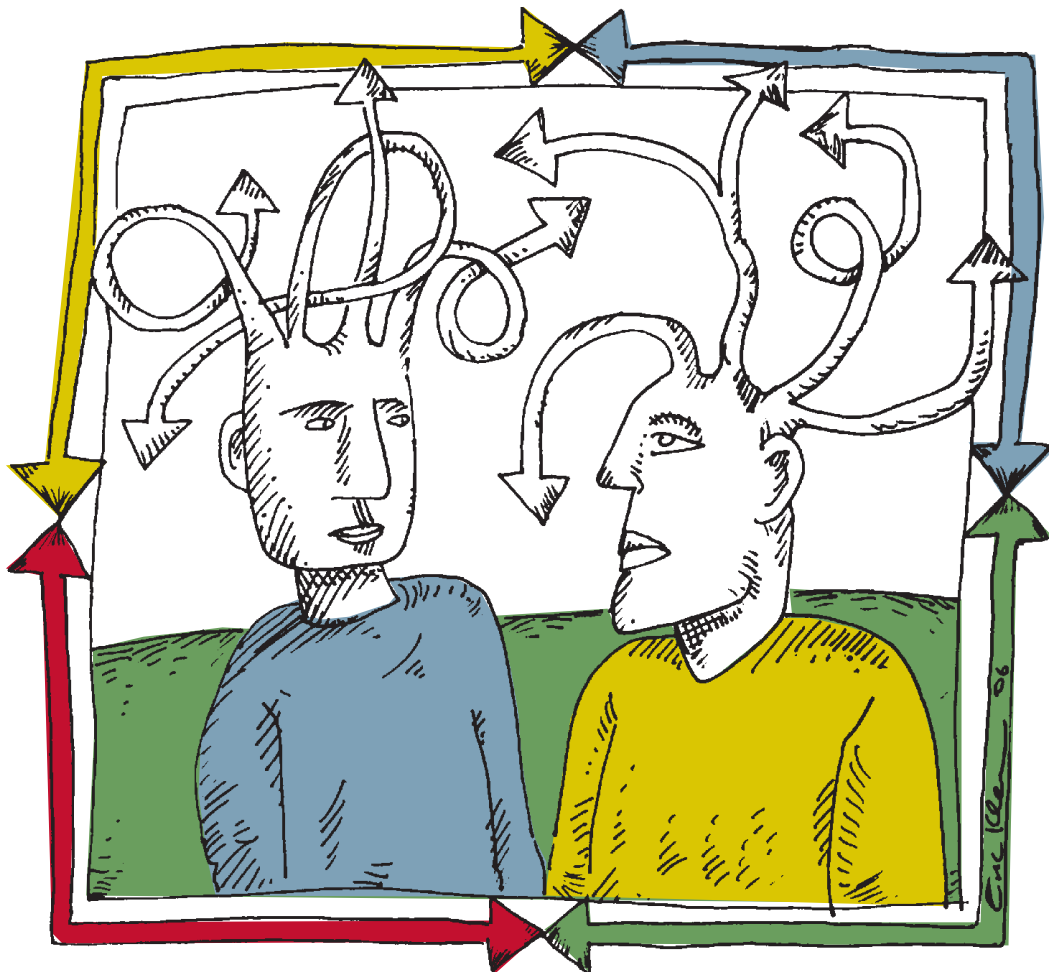


# Why Change Efforts Fail

(And how you can succeed with resistance-free change)

by Eric Klein  
Dharma Consulting



**T**he failure rate of organizational change efforts is staggering: nearly 75% do not succeed.

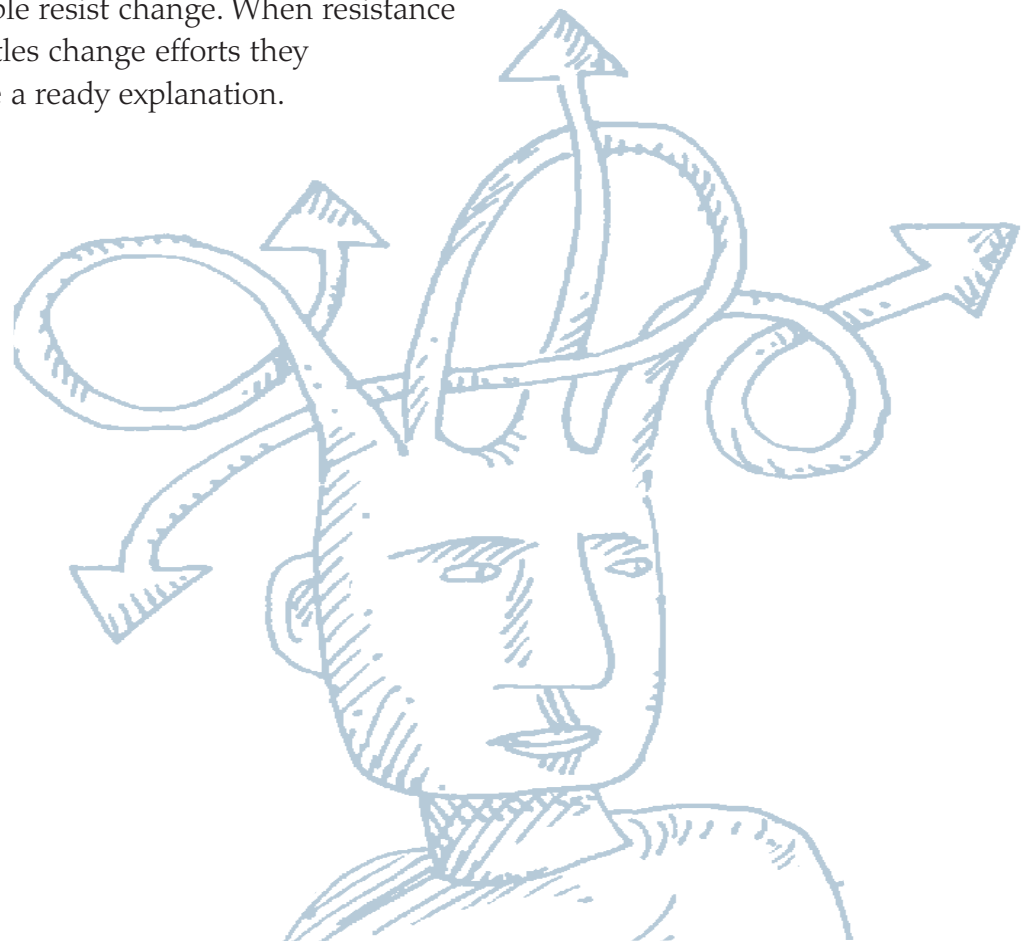
It's not through lack of trying. And it's not because of under funding.

"This failure to sustain significant change recurs again and again despite substantial resources committed to the change effort (many are bankrolled by top management)" writes Peter Senge in his book *Dance of Change*.

So, what makes change so tough?

### **A Convenient Un-Truth**

Lots of people (particularly those in the 75% failure camp) believe that people resist change. When resistance scuttles change efforts they have a ready explanation.



“After all,” they claim, “Running head-long into this wall of resistance is inevitable. Because, people always resist change.”

It’s just not true.

It is not inevitable or natural for people to resist change. People change all the time. Human beings are wired to change. We’ve been changing for millions of years. And our capacity for adaptation is only accelerating.

The impulse to evolve and the motivation to improve are wired into our brains and bodies. We are more naturally oriented to change than resist. Yet, most organizational change efforts continue to fall flat.

There is an explanation for the dismal 75% failure rate of organizational changes. When you study unsuccessful change efforts up close, one common pattern emerges:

1. The more obvious, tangible, and relatively easy-to-address aspects of the change are tackled.
2. The invisible, intangible, risky, and ultimately most powerful aspects are ignored.



## The Tangible Aspects of Change

When you focus on the obvious aspects of a change effort you attend to:

- **Financial results**
- **Performance metrics**
- **Systems**
- **Processes**

All these elements are tangible, “hard stuff”, factual, and objective. They fit nicely on a spreadsheet. They are all very important and mustn’t be overlooked.

It’s just that the tendency is to over-focus on these tangible elements and to give the intangible aspects of change short shrift. It is this imbalance that keeps sucking most of us into the 75% failure cycle.

## The Intangible Aspects of Change

The intangible aspects of change are factors like:

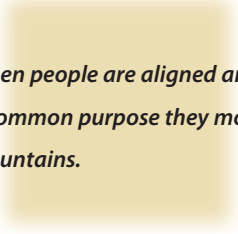
- **Purpose**
- **Values**
- **Passion**
- **Alignment**

All these elements are intangible, “soft stuff”, emotional, and subjective. They don’t fit on a spreadsheet. They can’t be easily captured on a PowerPoint presentation.

And yet, these intangible elements make or break change efforts. When we ignore them, they come back to bite us.

This soft stuff has a real, hard and tangible impact on organizational results. Soft stuff is real—it has more to do with your success or failure than the project plan.

When people are passionate and committed to a result, they make it happen. When people are aligned around a common purpose, they move mountains.

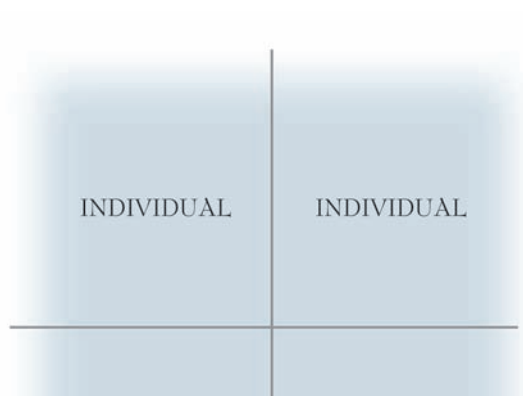


*When people are aligned around a common purpose they move mountains.*

## Focus on Both

Philosopher Ken Wilber's Integral Model provides an ideal framework for avoiding the 75% failure trap. The Integral Model encompasses all aspects of change—the tangible/objective and the intangible/subjective.

The basic model takes the form of a quadrant diagram. The upper quadrants deal with the individual.



The lower quadrants deal with the team or organization in which the individual participates.



The two left quadrants represent the inner, intangible, subjective aspects of change.



And the two right-hand quadrants represent the outer, observable, objective aspects.



Put it together and it looks like this:

	<i>Subjective</i>	<i>Objective</i>
INDIVIDUAL	SELF <i>Values</i> <i>Purpose</i> <i>Meaning</i>	SKILLS <i>Competencies</i> <i>Performance</i> <i>Behavior</i>
ORGANIZATION	CULTURE <i>Relationships</i> <i>Power Dynamics</i> <i>Trust &amp; Morale</i>	ENVIRONMENT <i>Structure &amp; Systems</i> <i>Policies &amp; Procedures</i> <i>"Bottom Line"</i> <i>Measures</i>

## Four Windows on Change

These quadrants are like windows. Each offers a particular view on change. Each view is real. And partial. No quadrant, on its own, gives the whole picture. Each has its own story to tell.

Let's pull back the curtain on each of these windows, one at a time, and check out the view.

### Lower Right Quadrant

When you look through the Lower Right (LR) quadrant you get a view of the objective aspects of the organization.

You see things like:

- **Technical and business systems**
- **Organizational structures**
- **Financials and other performance measurements,**
- **Policies and procedures**
- **Regulations governing your industry.**

If you want to improve the organization from a LR perspective, you will quite naturally set about:

- **Re-designing systems**
- **Getting new equipment**
- **Re-structuring**
- **Re-configuring policies or procedures**

## Lower Left Quadrant

When you look through the Lower Left (LL) hand quadrant you get a completely different view of organizational change. This perspective reveals the subjective aspects of organizational life. Rather than focus on policies and written procedures (like in the LR), here you see how informal networks and relationships are “the way things really get done around here.”

You see:

- **How unwritten rules about what can and can't be done influence results**
- **The ways in which people are or aren't aligned around a shared purpose.**

When your attention is fixed on the LL quadrant, your change efforts will quite naturally focus on:

- **Developing shared vision and purpose**
- **Revising the un-written rules that limit effectiveness**
- **Facilitating honest dialogue to create aligned action.**

## Upper Right Quadrant

Pulling back the curtain on the Upper Right (UR) Quadrant, you become acutely aware of how individual actions promote or undermine successful changes. Viewing change through this window focuses on:

- **Technical skills**
- **Business skills**
- **Interpersonal skills**
- **Leadership skills**

*Only by including the inner work of personal and culture change along with the outer work of strategy and skill development can you beat the dismal odds.*



The UR quadrant also makes you aware that habits of behavior are the keys to being highly successful.

With your attention on the UR quadrant you naturally invest in:

- **Developing individuals' skills**
- **Defining competencies**
- **Promoting habits of peak performance**

## Upper Left Quadrant

Finally, let's pull back the curtain on the Upper Left quadrant.

Here you realize that individuals have their own thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about what a specific change really means. Looking through the UL quadrant, you recognize that implementing change puts pressure on an individual's:

- **Values**
- **Identity**
- **Sense of purpose**

You see that until individuals can make personal sense of the change, it is hard for them to really buy-in. And that without their buy-in it's hard to get anything more than their grudging compliance.

With your attention on the UL quadrant, you naturally invest in guiding people through the inner shifts—psychologically, emotionally, spiritually—that will commit them to making the change successful.

## The Key to Resistance-free Change

So, the key to resistance-free change is to look through all four windows. To give attention, time, and resources to working in all quadrants.

And to make sure that all four quadrants are aligned towards the same result.

Resistance, and the 75% failure syndrome, comes from over-focusing on one or two of these perspectives while ignoring the others.

*So, the key to resistance-free change is to look through all four windows.*

In our conversations with thousands of people from over 30 countries – a clear pattern has emerged. The vast majority of change efforts deal with the LR quadrant—re-structuring, developing new strategies, policies etc. Many change efforts also incorporate the UR quadrant—through skill training and competency models.

### What's Missing?

But, the vast majority of change efforts neglect the left-hand quadrants. They don't deal directly with shifting the culture or people's own sense of purpose and meaning. Those that do break out of the 75% failure cycle and discover the joy of resistance-free change.

When change efforts incorporate all quadrants—integrating inner and outer work into a single equation—human energy and passion drives the change.

### Is This Some Kind of Touchy-Feely Thing?

Some people are uncomfortable with words like human energy and passion. They worry about being touchy-feely. They imagine singing Kum Ba Yah and a big group hug.

Forget the hug.

Remember that world-class teams and organizations are lively places, brimming with human energy. Great cultures are passionate, purposeful, and fun. Organizations that have such cultures routinely lead their markets.

In fact, no less a pragmatist than Dr. Edward Deming (often called the father of quality, <http://www.deming.org>) proclaimed to leaders that, "There can be no organizational transformation without personal transformation."

*Great cultures are passionate, purposeful, and fun. Organizations that have such cultures routinely lead their markets.*

## Why Do Leaders Over-Focus on Systems?

Here's what leaders tell me:

*"It is easier to work on the systems and structures or to develop a new strategy. It's tangible stuff. I've done it before. It's familiar. I know how."*

These same leaders know that it's not enough. They tell me that until people buy-in they won't focus their human energy on making the change successful. Without personal commitment and culture change—nothing really takes off.

***"There can be no organizational transformation without personal transformation."***

— Dr. Edward Deming

## Where's the Key?

The tendency to over-focus on one or two quadrants reminds me of a story from the Sufi tradition about the wise-fool known as Mulla Nassruddin. Nassruddin is a trickster figure who pokes fun at conventional attitudes. He offers those of us who want to change a dose of profound wisdom in the guise of humor and paradox.

The Mulla Nassrudin was discovered late one evening on his hands and knees searching intently in the road beneath a street lamp. His friend, coming upon him in this position, asked,

*"Mulla, what are you looking for?"*

*Nassruddin replied, "I am searching for my keys."*

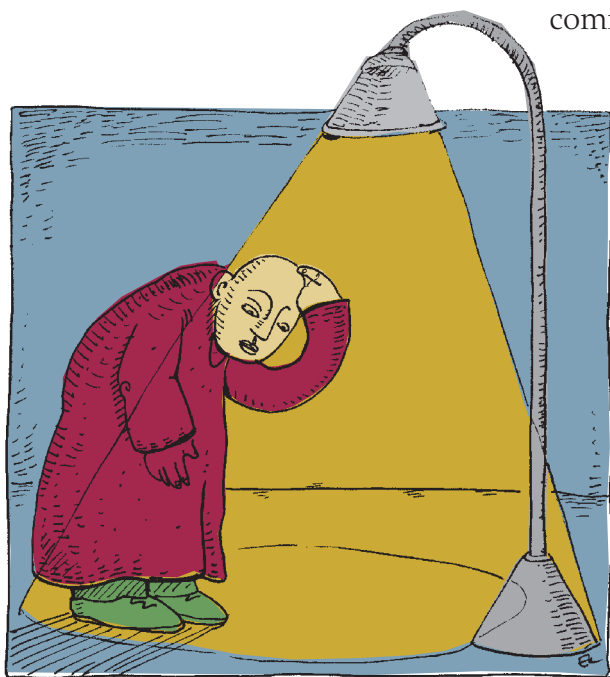
*"Where did you lose them?" the friend inquired.*

*"Across the street," was the ready reply.*

*"Then why," asked the confused friend, "are you searching so intently over here?"*

*"Oh," explained Nassrudin, looking up, "the light here is much better."*

Just like Nassrudin, most of us are still searching for the secret to resistance-free change in the LR or UR hand quadrants. We are stuck in doing what we know how to do—even when it isn't working.



When “rolling out” change efforts there is often the recognition that “we must change the culture”. There’s talk about culture change. What this ends up meaning, in practice, though is more attention to systems and skills. We work on the right-hand quadrants—while talking about the left-hand ones. And still the inner aspects of change are unaddressed.

### What is Resistance Really?

Much of what is termed resistance to change is the struggle people have, individually and collectively, with reorganizing their sense of identity, meaning, values, and sense of possibilities.

They’re not resistant. They’re struggling with an inner journey. People need help to make this inner journey. They seldom get it in the way most change efforts are constructed.

The key to change isn’t in any one quadrant. It is in the combination. Only by including the inner work of personal and culture change along with the outer work of strategy and skill development can you beat the dismal odds.

So, is real change possible?

Albert Einstein said, “We cannot solve our current problems using the same level of awareness that created them.”

Can you do better than an over 75% failure rate? My answer is yes, but only if you lead change in an integral way—working in all the quadrants outlined above.

### A Common Pattern that Undermines Change Efforts:

**The more obvious, tangible, and relatively easy-to-address aspects of the change are tackled.**

**The invisible, intangible, risky, and ultimately most powerful aspects are ignored.**

Here is a quick worksheet with questions to get you thinking in all quadrants.

First, bring to mind a change that you either want to make or are in the process of implementing. Then answer the questions in each quadrant—keeping that change in mind.

	<i>Subjective</i>	<i>Objective</i>
INDIVIDUAL	<p>SELF</p> <p><i>What am I thinking/feeling that is promoting the desired result?</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>What am I thinking/feeling that is limiting the desired result?</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>SKILLS</p> <p><i>What am I doing that is promoting the desired result?</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>What am I doing or not doing that is limiting the desired result?</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
ORGANIZATION	<p>CULTURE</p> <p><i>What unwritten rules are promoting/limiting the desired result?</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>What power dynamics are promoting/limiting the desired result?</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>ENVIRONMENT</p> <p><i>What aspects of the system are promoting the desired result?</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>What aspects of the system are limiting the desired result?</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

- What do your answers to these questions suggest?

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- Where do you need to put your attention in order to:  
Work in all quadrants

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Align all quadrants towards a common goal

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### The Next Steps

The next step in mastering resistance-free change is to subscribe to the Resistance-Free Change newsletter. You can subscribe at:

[www.dharmaconsulting.com](http://www.dharmaconsulting.com)

On the site you will find many resources for yourself, your team, and your organization. All are focused on giving you practical ways to make changes that improve your work and enrich your life at the same time.

# About Eric Klein

Eric Klein is a visionary, author, community leader, business advisor, and professional speaker on leadership development, corporate culture, and organizational change. For 20 years, Eric has worked with over 15,000 leaders from a wide variety of corporate settings: Fortune 500 companies, healthcare, municipal, governmental and non-profit organizations—as well as mid-size companies.

Over the past two decades Eric Klein has been a leading voice in the movement to bring greater spirit, meaning, and authenticity to the workplace—most recently through his firm, Dharma Consulting. His transformative message and practical approach has helped leaders create organizations where values and purpose fuel productivity, accountability, and collaboration.

Eric Klein has held management positions at two Fortune 500 companies and successfully developed businesses in the education, publishing, and consulting industries. Eric combines his experiences in business with 30 years of teaching and practicing meditation. He is one of the few Westerners to have received ordination into a 5,000-year-old yoga lineage. With his wife Deborah, Eric leads the Wisdom Heart Community, a non-profit organization that brings classical meditation methods to people grappling with the challenges of modern life.

Eric's most recent book is *You are the Leader You've Been Waiting For: Enjoying High Performance and High Fulfillment at Work*. At once this life-changing book provides a blueprint for infusing excellence, meaning, and creativity into work.

He is also the co-author of the best selling book *Awakening Corporate Soul: Four Paths to Unleash the Power of People at Work* (over 250,000 copies sold) and *To Do or Not To Do: How Successful Leaders Make Better Decisions* based on research and experiences with more than 200 companies.

His unique work has been featured on CNN and in the *Los Angeles Times*, *HealthCare Forum*, *The American Medical Journal*, *Leadership Reflections*, *Quality and Productivity*, and the *Association Management Magazine*.



*“There is a part of us that knows  
the contribution we most want to  
make through our lives. When we  
align our daily actions with this  
purpose, we become fully alive.”*

—Eric Klein

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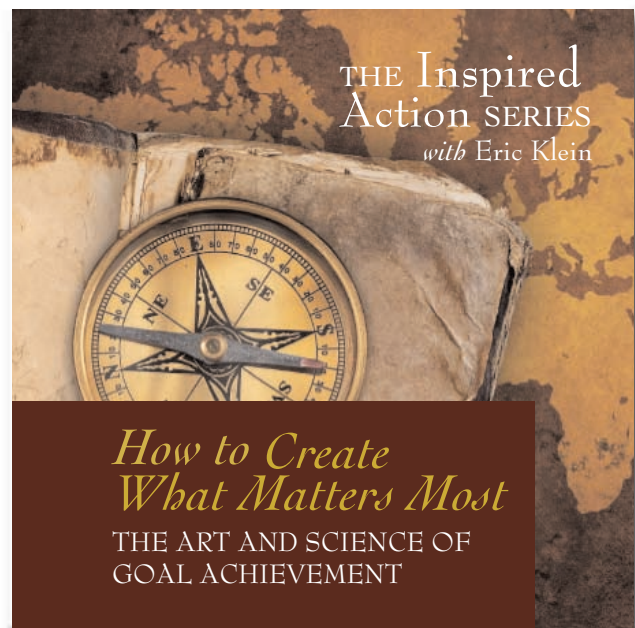
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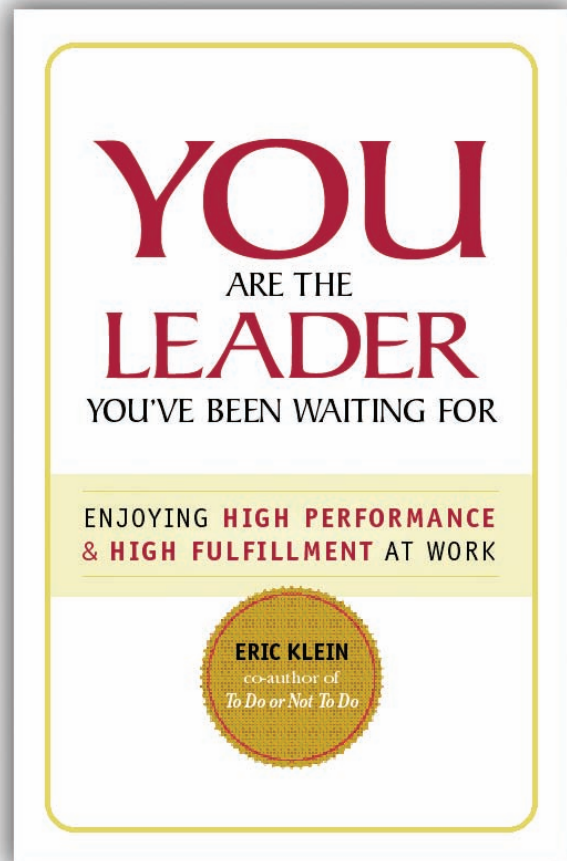
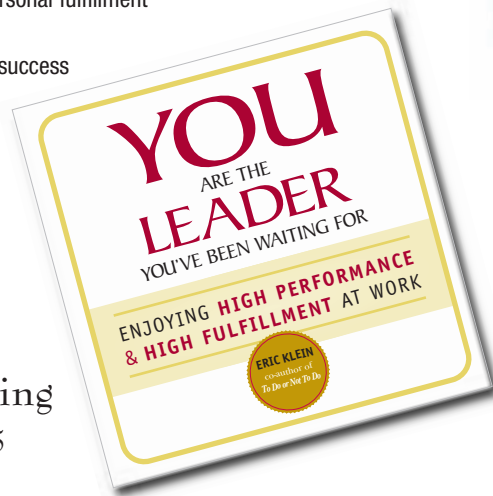
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- A 10-module DVD of Eric Klein presenting the following transformational concepts:
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—Joe Rassenti  
Vice President, Engineering,  
QUALCOMM